

# 2007 Floods in South Asia: From Impact to Knowledge

- Floods in Bihar: Shelter Lessons from Gujarat Earthquake
- The Bihar Floods 2007: A Devastating Disaster
- Flash Floods in Mountain Areas



From an Effort to Turn Local Tsunami Recovery into Regional Disaster Risk Reduction for the Poor



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Special Issue: 39

October 2007

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This special issue of *southasiadisasters.net* is the third of a series of three on flooding in South Asia. In this issue the Bihar floods and AIDMI's response is explained and lessons from ICIMOD are presented in dealing with flash floods in mountainous areas. It discusses the World Urban Forum to be held in China in 2008, which will address urban floods issues with an emphasis on the poor, and analyses how lessons from the 2001 Gujarat earthquake recovery can be used in responding to the recent floods in Bihar. This issue closes the special series on flooding in South Asia. The main message of this series is that there should be more communication between social and technical actors in flood and disaster management. More action and less discussion is needed in a world of disasters.

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**KEY IDEA**

# Towards Community Managed Flood Risk

As one born 10 feet beneath sea level in the northern part of Holland, I can sympathise with flood victims. Indeed, the landscape I grew up in is testimony of the Dutch people's struggle with water, and scarred with the remains of battles lost. The dike burst in 1916 that threatened to flood Amsterdam has left many small, but deep lakes at the inside of our supposedly safe flood barriers. In 1995, I was surprised to meet flood refugees seeking shelter in my own house, at a time when a similar disaster nearly occurred in the southern parts of the Netherlands, due to unexpected swelling of its main rivers.

There is no escaping the hazards in this world, not in my home country and not, as you all know, in South Asia. The main story of this issue is very clear on the rampage caused by the 2007 floods in Bihar. It is very specific on the assistance to be rendered immediately after the floods. AIDMI is right in pointing to the state authorities responsibility in prompting, facilitating and coordinating relief efforts. As well as correct in referring to the large number of local NGOs, that, together with their international counterparts can play a pivotal role in helping flood victims. Yet, the overview of the devastating effects of the 2007 rainy season begs the question: "Could more have been done to lessen the impact of the flooding? "

Cordaid, with its overseas partners, has some experience with seasonal flooding and ways of softening their blow. Our latest insights take stock of the importance of good coordination as well as valuing the respective roles authorities, international and national NGO's need to play. Lessons learned point to the need for aid workers to be well trained, well informed and equipped to move swiftly into action when lives and livelihoods are threatened. But more important than all this, we have gathered conclusive evidence that investments in preparedness, scenario building and risk reduction measures, at community level, pay off handsomely. Cordaid, with its South Asian partners has engaged in a series of workshops to disseminate the notion of community managed Disaster Risk Reduction: local communities analyse their disaster risk and translate this into action. Community managed DRR is not another buzz word, it is an age old adagio, since it's the local people that are so hard hit, it will be up to the local communities to undertake decisive and effective counter measures. That is how, over centuries, the Dutch community developed fairly successful ways of managing our flood hazards. That is why AIDMI is right in pointing towards the underlying causes of the damage, i.e. the lack of overall development in Bihar as a determining factor of the severity of the flood impact. Long term, strategic and people centered development will be the key to durable risk reduction. ■

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This issue of *southasiadisasters.net* is designed as a special contribution to the **8th Regional Training: Flood Disaster Risk Management Course**; October 8–19, 2007, Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre (ADPC), Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) Bangkok, Thailand.

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## Reducing Flood Risks: From Project to Process Results

If the floods of 2007 are any indication of the increasing severity of disasters, then international and government agencies, donors, aid and development organisations need to increasingly consider the importance of Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) based strategic thinking. While there is a growing global trend in this direction, it is still marked by a noticeable lack of communication and partnership between local stakeholders and national level policy makers. As long as this gap remains, too little of the community-based knowledge gained in the aftermath of a disaster will be utilised.

Most disaster response thinking is still very top down and donor driven, flowing through formal institutional mechanisms and so-called international disaster experts. Administrators, scholars, and politicians at the top determine a national strategy that is often dictated to regional and local level authorities; oftentimes without considering the capacity, experiences or efforts of the community.

AJWS and its partners around the world, with AIDMI at the forefront, believe that national authorities can support local initiatives, while remaining consistent with national disaster response priorities. Whereas national guidance is necessary to create a level of uniformity and structure, it can not be done at the expense of local involvement. Ultimately, it has to be a two-way dialogue where both local and national stakeholders build upon and support each others' strategies and learn from each other's experience.

A key gap in global DRR thinking is an overemphasis on DRR as a project rather than as a process. International and national agencies seem to place their focus on DRR-specific initiatives and organisations, discounting the wider community of community organisations affected by and addressing disaster. Many organisations do not define themselves as "disaster" players, but nonetheless they end up being first responders due to their commitment and recognition within a community. It is as important to work with and learn from these broader development

organisations as it is to strengthen local DRR players.

Additionally, one must examine the risks that are inherent within particular social systems. Urbanisation, destruction of slums, marginalisation of indigenous communities and forced migration all factor in to the impact of disasters. Likewise, by understanding how communities learn from past disasters and how social actors respond to community need, policy makers, donors and technical practitioners can work with communities to develop effective and sustainable responses.

The only solace to be found in the aftermath of the disastrous floods of 2007 is the possibility that we will learn from the resilience of the communities that survived them. It is the role of national and international NGOs to document these learnings and bring them to national policy makers that as we speak are shaping the international DRR agenda. ■

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## Floods in Bihar: Shelter Lessons from Gujarat Earthquake

Food and water relief in Bihar is at secondary stage. NGOs and the public authorities will now be taking up shelter and livelihood recovery activities further. It may be a good time to draw lessons from one of the more successful shelter reconstruction processes after Gujarat Earthquake 2001, to ensure sustainable shelter recovery in Bihar.

In July and August 2007, the community based action and research organisation, All India Disaster Mitigation Institute (AIDMI), Ahmedabad, carried out a community evaluation of the permanent shelter

support given after the devastating 2001 earthquake in Gujarat. The focus of the evaluation was on the way the victims themselves viewed the shelter recovery after the passage of six years. The objective of this review was to reveal the long-term effects of the shelter recovery work, positive and negative aspects, as well as providing useful guidelines for future humanitarian response, such as ongoing flood relief in Bihar. By now, more than 80 months have passed and one can really see the long-term effects of the shelter relief and recovery operation after the devastating earthquake. In the Kutch

district, a community survey among disaster affected people in 10 different locations was carried out by AIDMI's local team, as well as interviews with 10 different local NGOs, international NGOs and governmental agencies was conducted. Lessons learnt at this stage from the Gujarat Earthquake (report is under progress) can provide useful guidelines for the upcoming shelter recovery in Bihar.

When rebuilding houses after a shattering disaster—may it be floods or cyclones or earthquakes—several key points are important to keep in mind. First, coordination on state,



Approximately one million houses were needed to be reconstructed or repaired after the 2001 Gujarat earthquake.

district and community level is absolutely crucial in order to get an efficient shelter relief operation started, both between different NGOs as well as between organisations and the government. Without multi-sectoral and multi-agency coordination, shelter recovery may take too long to take off, or may take off with huge avoidable upfront costs. Furthermore, when choosing the rebuilding approach, lessons from the mentioned earthquake evaluation showed that an owner driven approach is preferable. This approach started in Gujarat by NGOs such as Abhiyan, CARE, SEWA, ASAG and ActionAid and is now refined by SNEHA, NESHA, Women's Collective and others in tsunami recovery in South India.

By involving the local flood affected population in the rebuilding process, the survivors will not only get a greater ownership to their house, but the approach can also have an important positive psychological impact by letting the affected people remake their communities. This owner driven approach does not mean that NGOs and the government decide the amount and schedule and pace and the owners build the structure. Any effective owner driven approach means that key decisions are taken by the owner on his or her own and that the NGOs and the government support their decisions with recourses, technical inputs, and

enabling the legal and policy environment. A problematic aspect of the owner driven approach can be that the beneficiaries often are reluctant to contribute with money and material, as they are repeatedly facing a situation where NGOs and the authorities do not

come up with pledged amount of support. Owners, even when victims, are willing to pay money and labour both when they are sure that the pledged money and support will come in time, and in full amount, from the NGOs and the authorities.

In Gujarat, most of the houses were built in-situ (build at the same spot as the previous affected house) which was the preferred solution from the local population. When choosing in-situ, the location will be familiar to the affected population, but especially in the case of flooding where the same areas often get flooded year after year, relocation can be a better option. Relocation has to be decided by the owner and not pushed by the NGOs or the authorities. When the owners lead the relocation process, houses have higher rate of occupancy while where owners are forced to be relocated, the occupancy rate is far lower. Design should be familiar to the affected population, as well as culturally and socially acceptable. Often, the old design can be used as reference point, as in Kutch, where the majority of the houses are designed according to the harsh local conditions and

needs. In flood prone areas, using stronger and longer lasting materials can to a certain extent limit the damage caused by the flood waters. Building material depots are an easy and effective way to move ahead in Bihar. As there is a limit to how long people can live in temporary shelters, the permanent shelters should be finished as soon as possible and preferably within six months. In many cases temporary shelter can be avoided, or build in such a way that it grows into a permanent shelter over time and with pace suitable to the owner and not the authorities. However, after large scale disasters such as the 2001 Gujarat Earthquake and the 2007 Bihar floods, this can be difficult to achieve without effective NGO and government coordination across sectors, locations and agencies.

Although the floods and earthquakes as disasters vary in scope and nature, the key findings from the Gujarat evaluation report process can still be used as guidelines for the disaster that now is unfolding in the Bihar districts. However, to avoid future widespread damage caused by flooding, the underlying causes of flooding will need to be addressed comprehensively, to avoid that the area is trapped in a vicious cycle of repeated flooding and devastation. ■



Press release by the Bihar State Disaster Management Department in the first week of August 2007 states that 73,784 houses were damaged during the floods, causing damage of Rs. 390 million.

# The Bihar Floods 2007: A Devastating Disaster

The South Asian floods of 2007 are some of the worst in living memory, with an estimated 28 million people affected in India, Bangladesh and Nepal. Food, drinking water and medicine distribution is underway but the scale of the disaster has dwarfed relief efforts.

The food situation gives "serious cause for concern" because of the loss of animals and unfavourable crop prospects following damage to recently planted crops, according to the latest UN update. "Opportunities for replanting once the water has fully recedes are limited as the sowing period of the main cereal season will have ended" UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). UNICEF has expressed deep concern about the continuing threat from hunger, disease and malnutrition for the millions of children and women affected by the flooding which has killed almost 2,800 people in the three countries and Pakistan. Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Assam accounts for approximately 25% of national rice production, and whilst cereal production in these areas is likely to be reduced, output at national level will depend on weather conditions in the coming months according to the FAO.

UNICEF and its NGO partners are concerned that standing water could become a breeding ground for mosquitoes and waterborne diseases and are coordinating the Government's relief efforts by providing support for health, nutrition, water and sanitation. This includes tarpaulin, water purifying agents (tablets, powder and solutions), oral rehydration salts, family hygiene kits and essential medicines. Forecasts of more rain threaten people of all ages, but elderly and pregnant women are

particularly vulnerable to being swept away by floodwater. Pregnant women are also in desperate need of medical attention, with several newborn babies having died from the lack of post-natal care in Bihar between August 1 and August 5, 2007. A shortage of qualified doctors also poses the problem of who will be able to effectively administer the medical supplies once they arrive.

Bihar has been identified by the United Nations as being an area that is particularly badly hit, and with approximately 12 million people affected as of August 2007, much more needs to be done to alleviate suffering in the region. The Bihar State Disaster Management Department issued the following figures in the first week of August.

Bihar is no stranger to seasonal flooding, annually at risk from the effects of increased water flow during the monsoon rains but the flooding 2007 has been particularly severe. Major rivers, including the Budi Gandak, Bagmati, Koshi and Kamala

have been flowing above danger levels and Central Water Commission sources say that the situation is set to continue following incessant rain in the catchment areas of these rivers.

AIDMI sent a team to Bihar on August 11, 2007 with a mandate to assess the situation and if any intervention was deemed feasible, to produce a proposal outlining the specifics of this intervention. Following meetings with the State Disaster Management Department for a guide to the severity of the situation, the AIDMI representatives met with local NGOs to discuss the situation. Following introductory discussions that focussed on the nature of the work of the respective organisations, the team spent three days in the field, visiting affected villages with two local NGOs, Gram Vikas Parishad (GVP) and Samajik Shaikshaniik Vikas Kendra (SSVK). Three days were spent visiting the villages to see the effects of flooding, documenting it and communicating with the local communities to find out what were their most urgent needs.

## Damage by the 2007 Floods in Bihar

	Total affected in the state	Total affected in Madhubani district*
Districts	19 (of 38)	1
Blocks	175	20
Panchayats	971	260
Villages	6108	666
Population (millions)	11.98	1.61
Crop area (million hectares)	1.09	0.14
Crop losses (Rs. billion)	1.31	0.79
Houses damaged (number in thousand)	73,784	35,655
Houses damaged (Rs. million)	390.23	545.8
Public property damaged (Rs. million)	127.00	374.95
Human casualties	91	7
Livestock losses	76	12

\* AIDMI responded food relief operation. Source: GVP, SSVK and Government of Bihar



Heavy rains and massive floods have damaged infrastructure severely, mainly roads, small and medium sized bridges, and checkdams and ponds.

The provision of food rations, namely rice, flat rice, pulse, turmeric and salt is of primary importance. People have been without sufficient food supplies for at least one month. Homes have been lost or damaged and materials for temporary shelter as well as more long term permanent shelter plans are needed. The importance of shelter provision should not be underestimated as further flooding is expected this month and the rains are predicted to continue for almost two months.

Although emergency relief is not typical of the work undertaken by

AIDMI, the gravity of the situation calls for a response. An immediate short term plan was formulated through a meeting. The cost of food support for a family of approximately 6 people for a period of 10 days is about Rs 450, and AIDMI has committed to work with GVP and SSVK to provide rations for 500 families. A second team has been sent to Bihar to ensure a rapid response that is effective across society, including marginalised groups such as *dalits*.

State Government has had difficulties responding to the disaster and has

only undertaken aerial surveys as part of an initial response after receiving criticism for its failure to launch relief and rescue operations. However, the people of Bihar find themselves in a desperate situation, and it is time that the government takes action now. The delayed response of the government is possibly a result of the Gautam Goswami scam, the former civil servant who has been accused of misappropriating government funds that were allocated for flood relief. The government has been reluctant to engage in the necessary relief work after the 2007 Bihar floods, but measures should have been taken to make the monitoring of funds more stringent in order to prevent fraud instead of a policy of inaction whilst people suffer.

Prime minister Manmohan Singh has allocated Rs 2.32 billion from the Prime Minister's Calamity Relief Fund for relief exercises in Bihar, and Rs 5.5 billion has already been given; the second instalment of the money had not been released because the state had not submitted its utilisation certificate (as per the requirements) but the funds have been released as an exception due to the severity of the situation. (*Indian Asian News Services, August 9*)

The government has requested army assistance, four Indian Air Force helicopters and 6002 boats have been engaged to carry out the distribution of relief amongst the flood affected people. Bihar has also sought central assistance of Rs 32.2 billion for carrying out relief and rescue operations in its flood-affected areas. It has specifically asked for two million tonnes of wheat and rice for distribution as relief amongst the flood victims, mostly living on embankments, roads, bridges and rooftops. The Chief Minister has also asked the Prime Minister to tour the flood-hit areas and to provide additional assistance from the disaster relief fund.

Materials Needed	Procurement
Rice, Flat Rice and Pulse	To be procured from the local or regional grain wholesale market by each partner NGO
Turmeric Powder and Salt	To be procured from the local wholesale market by each partner NGO
Polythene Sheets	To be preferably procured from Patna when compared to the local market both for reasons of quality and the steep prices that prevail in the local markets on account of huge demand for them.
Bamboo Poles (For propping up polythene sheets)	To be procured locally

Approximately 30,000 NGOs are registered in the state and many of these do very good work. However, the extent of communication between various responding organisations is not known and there is a limit to what a collection of NGOs and international donor agencies can accomplish.

International organisations such as Oxfam are present but at the time of the AIDMI field visit but had yet to start relief programmes and were still at the intervention assessment stage. If the government were to cooperate effectively and help coordinate their efforts then the response would be much more successful. The office of the Chief Minister is coordinating what official response there is but it is not open to recognition of the extent of the problems facing the people of Bihar or criticism of the current response.

Central parts of the state are quite hilly, and to the south is the Chota Nagpur plateau, formerly part of Bihar but now within the state of Jharkhand that was created in 2000. River flooding and water-logging has become a recurring phenomenon since 1954. Before this time, even the strongest river flows did not result in too great a loss in terms of human lives and property, but the construction of embankments to control flooding and ensure irrigation have caused a problem. Whilst effective when controlling average rainfall, heavy rainfall causes embankment breaches, depositing large amounts of silt that renders the previously fertile land unusable. The embankments then serve to prevent the recession of the flood water, lengthening the period of water-logging and increasing the severity of the floods that they were designed to prevent, which has been confirmed by data analysis of flooding.

Embankment construction represents a significant financial opportunity for



*Almost all districts of Bihar have been hit by the floods. After the initial phase of immediate relief, AIDMI is now working with the affected communities toward longer-term recovery.*

building contractors which results in corruption. Many contractors go on to become MLAs and Ministers in Bihar; Bihar is one of the most corrupt states in India, with 49% of officials having a criminal conviction against their name.

The severity of the flooding in 2007 has primarily been caused by prolonged periods of high rainfall and this has been compounded by increased water flows from the melting Himalayan glaciers. Village roads constructed without adequate drainage systems, non-preparedness of the disaster management department and the delayed response



*A house in Bihar state severely damaged by the floods in August. AIDMI is covering its beneficiaries with microinsurance against losses to future hazards.*

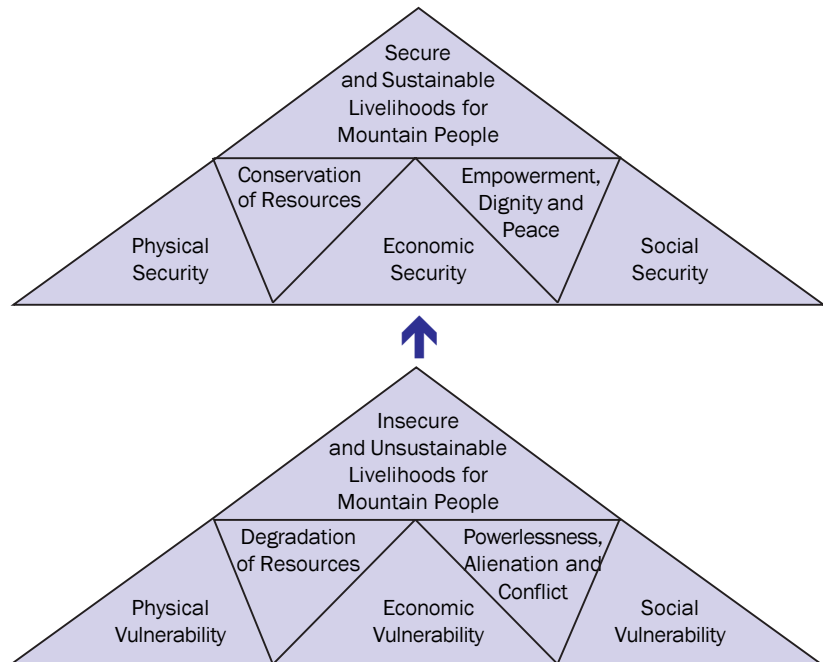
Source: [newsimg.bbc.co.uk](http://newsimg.bbc.co.uk)

of the state government have all contributed too.

Bihar is a very fertile area and should enjoy much more prosperity than it actually does. Vulnerability to natural disaster aside, it has suffered from a lack of development through political apathy and corruption, leaving the people as some of the most impoverished in the country, particularly in rural districts such as Madhubani. However, efforts focus on relief once the floods have happened with little done to address the underlying causes of the problem and once the flood situation eases, the problem of flooding is removed from the agenda until the next year when the state once again faces the same threat. Embankments have been the control measure of choice and various alternatives have not really been explored bar the proposed river inter-linking project that was hampered by inter-state politics before the environmental impact could even be assessed. Unless there is a significant shift in thinking, the situation for the people of Bihar is unlikely to change and various reports coming from flood affected areas paint a harrowing picture of human suffering. ■

# Flash Floods in Mountain Areas

In order to be able to respond to flash floods in a better way AIDMI attended the 'Regional Training on Flash Floods Risk Management in the Himalayas' conference from August 1 to August 10, 2007, organised by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD). This organisation is an applied research and development organisation which strives to change mountain vulnerabilities into security and sustainability for poor and marginalised peoples. Together with its partners ICIMOD works on peoples' economic, social and physical vulnerability in the Greater Himalayan region. This region includes Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal, and Pakistan. ICIMOD further ICIMOD main programmes concern Natural Resources Management; Agriculture and Rural Income Diversification, Water, Hazards and Environmental Management, Culture, Equity, Gender and Governance, Information and Knowledge Management, and Policy and Partnership Development. It further provides trainings, publications and fosters projects as well. ICIMOD is committed to prosperous and secure mountain communities working on peace,



ICIMODs approach and conceptualisation of the change from vulnerabilities into securities.

equity and environmental sustainability.

### AIDMI and ICIMOD:

AIDMI has been working in disaster field since 1989 Gujarat drought and continuously responding the disaster affected communities from its establishment. AIDMI has used participatory approach for providing

long term rehabilitation to disaster affected people of Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Pondichhery, Jammu & Kashmir and Bihar. Besides these relief and rehabilitation efforts, AIDMI has planned and organised various community based disaster preparedness training programmes for the affected communities for future disaster. The regional training workshop organised at ICIMOD has provided a great help AIDMI in term of better conceptual understanding. AIDMI training team would surely apply the learnt the concept i.e. Social Hazard Mapping and Assessment and Understanding and Identifying Local Knowledge on Flash Floods Preparedness, in future community based trainings. Inclusion of these concepts would certainly strengthen the training course and will generate more interest among the participants. Besides the training, AIDMI has carried out many researches in disaster affected areas. So, the research team will certainly use the concepts in future researches. ■



Regional Training conference on Flash Floods Risk Management in the Himalayas, August 1 to August 10, 2007, ICIMOD Secretariat, Kathmandu.



# Floods and Cities: World Urban Forum 2008, China

AIDMI has been asked to assist in setting the conference agenda for the World Urban Forum 2008. In this article we will explore AIDMI's role.

## Urbanisation: Problem or Challenge?

Unsustainable patterns of production and consumption, particularly in industrialised countries, environmental degradation, demographic changes, widespread and persistent poverty, and social and economic inequality have local, cross-national and global impacts that affect human settlements. It is projected by UN-HABITAT that in the next fifty years two-third of the world's population will live in cities. Therefore, it is clear that much more attention for urban areas is needed.

The UN-HABITAT World Urban Forum (WUF) was created after a merge of the Urban Environmental Forum and the International Forum on Urban Poverty, to strengthen international coordination and support for the Habitat Agenda UN-HABITAT. Also, Agenda 21-the UN-programme on sustainable development into the 21<sup>st</sup> century- provides input for the Habitat Agenda and the World Urban Forums. The WUF was established to examine and discuss human settlements in the context of rapid urbanisation in the last decades.

To understand how this works we will first explore the Habitat Agenda.

## The Habitat Agenda

This agenda describes the objectives, principles, commitments and a global plan for action to fulfil the mission of UN-HABITAT. This mission is "to promote socially and environmentally sustainable human settlements development and the achievement of adequate shelter for all". However, adequate shelter means more than a roof over one's head. It also means adequate privacy, adequate space, physical accessibility,



Many lives in an unimaginably miserable condition behind skyscrapers in developing megacities. For example, in Dharavi slums in Mumbai shown in the picture above, five hundred families share one communal toilet! One million people live in an area of approximately 1.5 sq km. Promoting living standard of the urban poor and discouraging migration into slums should be a primary agenda of the World Urban Forum 2008.

adequate security, security of tenure, structural stability and durability, adequate lighting, heating, ventilation, adequate basic infrastructure, such as water-supply, sanitation and waste-management facilities, suitable environmental quality and health-related factors; and adequate and accessible location with regard to work and basic facilities. These should be available at an affordable cost.

According to the Habitat Agenda, the most serious problems confronting cities and towns and their inhabitants include inadequate financial resources, lack of employment opportunities, spreading homelessness and expansion of squatter settlements, increased poverty and a widening gap between rich and poor, growing insecurity and rising crime rates, inadequate and deteriorating building stock, services and infrastructure, lack of health and educational facilities, improper land use, insecure land tenure, rising traffic congestion, increasing pollution, lack of green spaces, inadequate water supply and sanitation, uncoordinated urban development and an increasing vulnerability to disaster.

The agenda recognises that there is a need to improve human settlements and the quality of life, economic and social and to ensure environmental protection. These aspects should be a component of sustainable development focussed on shelter.

The goals and principles of the agenda are as follows:

- Equitable human settlements without discrimination in any form
- Eradication of poverty is essential
- Sustainable development is a prerequisite for human settlements and development. However, people also have to take their responsibility. Also, partnerships are needed to achieve sustainable development
- Access to basic goods, services and public means is needed
- The family is a basic unit of society
- There should be solidarity with vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in society
- Physical, mental and environmental health are basic needs

Prerequisites to achieve the mission of UN-HABITAT are:

- sustainable human settlements
- Enablement and participation
  - Support progress and support for all people
  - Promote gender equality as well as emancipation of other vulnerable groups
  - Encourage community based activities to reduce poverty
  - Promote capacity building
- Financing human settlement programmes
- International cooperation and partnerships

The Agenda also outlines a Global plan for action in which the government is stated to be the main responsible actor in achieving the goals of the UN-HABITAT. Most important points for action are:

- To provide shelter and shelter delivery
- To address vulnerable groups and people with special needs first
- Sustainable human settlements in an urbanising world through:
  - Sustainable land use
  - Social development
  - Population development: monitoring distribution of population growth, demographic aspects and more.
  - Environmental sustainability
  - Sustainable energy use
  - Sustainable transport and communication systems
  - Conservation and rehabilitation of historical and cultural heritage
  - Improving urban economies
  - Balanced development of settlements in rural regions
  - *Disaster prevention, mitigation, preparation and post-disaster capabilities*
    - Institutionalisation of disaster prevention
    - Ensure participation of local and/or affected people in disaster planning and management
    - Disseminate information on disaster resistant construction methods
    - Maintain infrastructure
    - Ensure protection of dangerous industrial sites

- Conduct need assessments with special attention for vulnerable groups
- Capacity building and institutional development: decentralisation, civil participation, settlement and metropolitan management
- International cooperation and coordination through technology transfers and information exchange
- Also an implementation and a follow up clause are included.

We will now explore a second programme used as input for the World Urban Forum: Agenda 21.

#### **Agenda 21: Sustainability into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

This UN programme was published at the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), or Earth Summit '92, in Rio de Janeiro, 1992. It is created around the concept of sustainability, defined by the UN as follows: "development that meets the need of the present without compromising the ability of future generation of future generations to meet their own needs". Agenda 21 calls for a global partnership for sustainable development and emphasises the responsibilities of national government and the need for more financial resources from developed countries in achieving this. The key elements of Agenda 21 are outlined below:

1. **Social and economic dimensions:**
  - International cooperation to accelerate sustainable development in developing countries and related domestic policies
  - Combating poverty
  - Changing consumption patterns
  - Protecting and promoting human health conditions
  - Integrating environment and development in decision-making
2. **Conservation and management of resources for development:**
  - Protection of the atmosphere
  - Combating deforestation

- Managing fragile ecosystems: combating desertification and drought
- Promoting sustainable agriculture and rural development
- Environmentally sound management of biotechnology
- Protection of the quality and supply of freshwater resources: application of integrated approaches to the development, management and use of water resources
- Environmentally sound management of toxic chemicals, including prevention of illegal international traffic in toxic and dangerous products
- Environmentally sound management of solid wastes and sewage-related issues
- Safe and environmentally sound management of radioactive wastes

#### **3. Strengthening the role of major groups:**

- Global action for women towards sustainable and equitable development
- Children and youth in sustainable development
- Recognising and strengthening the role of indigenous people and their communities
- Strengthening the role of non-governmental organisations: partners for sustainable development
- Local authorities' initiatives in support of Agenda 21
- Strengthening the role of workers and their trade unions
- Strengthening the role of business and industry
- Scientific and technological community support
- Strengthening the role of farmers

#### **4. Means of implementation:**

- Financial resources and mechanisms
- Transfer of environmentally sound technology, cooperation and capacity-building

- Promoting education, public awareness and training
- National mechanisms and international cooperation for capacity-building in developing countries
- International institutional arrangements
- International legal instruments and mechanisms
- Information for decision-making

This agenda is stated by the UN as a global plan of action with a focus on environmental issues. Now we understand the background of the World Urban Forum let us look at the key elements of the first three sessions of the forum.

### **The World Urban Forums**

#### **WUF-1**

- The sustainability of cities
- The role of cities in national and international development
- The management of the HIV/AIDS pandemic at the local level.
- Role of local authorities and other Habitat Agenda partners
- decentralisation
- City-to-city cooperation
- International role of NGOs
- Cities without slums
- Monitoring and assessment of urban conditions and trends
- Data collection, analysis and development of monitoring systems and urban observatories

#### **WUF-2 Cities: Crossroads of cultures, inclusiveness and integration?**

##### Urban:

- cultural aspects of cities
- best practices and successful policies
- governance
- decentralisation and democratisation
- poverty and slum dwellers
- resources to improve shelter
- sustainability
- services: water and sanitation
- disasters and reconstruction

#### **WUF-3 Our Future: Sustainable Cities - Turning Ideas into Action**

- Cities and the Millennium Development Goals
- Public Engagement: The Inclusive Approach
- Ideas for City Finances
- Urban Safety and Security
- Urban Planning and Management
- Cities and energy
- Water, Sanitation and Human Settlements
- The Role of Local Governments:
- The future of Cities

It appears that concern and attention for disasters—human made and natural—increased in the course of the forums. In the first session disaster preparedness is only mentioned once, as a part of sustainable development. In the second session, disaster preparedness and aspects of vulnerability are again mentioned in relation to sustainability. Further, there is more attention for the changing nature of armed conflicts and natural disasters. A call is made for a review of current ways of disaster relief. In addition, links between relief and development are discussed as well as roles and responsibilities of government authorities at all levels. WUF 2 presented disasters as "opportunities for sustainable development". In the third session of the World Urban Forum, disasters are mentioned in relation to growth and environment of cities. Also, in this session, disasters are seen as one of the constraints to human security and safety. Disasters in this respect, are often mentioned together with crime and violence, e.g. it is stated that delinquencies can flourish in the aftermath of a disasters. Further, a call was made to contextualise lessons and best practices of cities and settlements as cities are -obviously- very different from each other in terms of:

- Population: density and distribution
- Social geography and culture
- Geography

- Hydrological aspects (rivers, ponds, etc.)
- Infrastructure
- Protection measures
- City planning and management

#### **AIDMI and the fourth session of the World Urban Forum**

The WUF-4 will further focus and disaster management and preparedness. Discussions, workshops and seminar around the theme 'Sustainable Relief and Reconstruction (SRR)' will be held. During the 21<sup>st</sup> session of the Governing Council of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme -Kenya, April 2007- AIDMI was invited to be one of the organising members of the agenda of WUF-4 and to actively contribute to the forum in terms of workshops and trainings. As a community based, action research, planning and advocacy organisation, AIDMI wants to share its experiences and current activities in acting on disasters and to stimulate thinking and discussing about disaster management and relief. The focus of AIDMI will be on its activities and experiences with natural disaster such as the 2004 Tsunami and the numerous floods in Gujarat and other states in India. This forum will be an important global platform for organisations and other involved actors involved in disaster and flood management. As we can learn from this issue and the previous two on floods, more attention for flood preparedness and mitigation is needed. AIDMI will use lessons from its activities and its issues of *southasiadisasters.net* on flooding to contribute to this important forum.■

##### Sources:

1. <http://ww2.unhabitat.org/uf/introduction.htm>
2. [http://www.unhabitat.org/downloads/docs/1176\\_6455\\_The\\_Habitat\\_Agenda.pdf](http://www.unhabitat.org/downloads/docs/1176_6455_The_Habitat_Agenda.pdf)
3. Reports of the first, second and third session of the World Urban Forum, available at source 1.
4. <http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/documents/agenda21/english/agenda21toc.htm>
5. <http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/documents/agenda21/index.htm>

## **Bihar Flood and Relief**

*Madhubani is one of the poorest districts in the state, affected badly by the floods 2007. Around 500 people died and 3,00,000 people have been affected. Around 75,000 hectares of agricultural lands have been destroyed. AIDMI responded in this district with food relief operation, targeting marginalised dalit section of the affected populations. AIDMI has distributed 25 kg of food grains to 2085 families in 26 villages.*



### **Uden village in Benepatti Block**

*Flood victims gathered in one village of Benepati Block of Madhubani District for collecting the ration.*



### **Food relief center at Jhanjarpur**

*Flood victims are in queue to collect the ration as they lost their food grains in the floods.*



### **Food relief center at Jhanjarpure**

*Each beneficiary received ten days ration materials as per the family size.*



### **Beneficiaries from Nazra village at a relief center, Uden**

*Happy Feelings: Hope for the stable life.*

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*Note: This issue of southasiadisasters.net is prepared by AIDMI with major contributions from Jaap Vuijk, Hasmukh Sadhu, Pushkar Gupte and layout by Manish Patel.*

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